

776 character.¹ When there has been a death in a village, certain precautionary
[764] measures have to be taken in order that the spirit who caused the death
may not in some way or other work further evil.

But also on all other possible occasions the spirits are capable of working harm, indeed, Karsten is of opinion that the Indians, even when doing such commonplace acts as eating and drinking, fear that malicious spirits may surreptitiously effect an entrance into them along with the food or drink.² That the Indians have this belief is not so very remarkable. Similar conceptions are to be found among many peoples in different continents, and have also been widely spread in Europe. To mention one instance; in olden times on yawning or sneezing there was the custom of making the sign of the cross before the mouth, a custom founded on the fear that the devil or some of his kindred should slip in through the open mouth.

751 As a means of protecting themselves against evil spirits, or for securing, in a magical way, other advantages, the Choroti make use of a variety of devices, the most important of which are the covering of the body, painting of the face, dyeing textiles and other objects red, tattooing, wearing of amulets and certain ornaments, singing, blowing of whistles and shaking rattles, beating of drums, dancing, games of hazard, cutting or pulling out of hairs, and blood-letting.

The custom, previously mentioned, of the girls at their first menstruation keeping their heads covered with a cloth, is an instance of the first-mentioned magical means of protection.

302 At dances and lovers' meetings the Indians paint their faces (see page
751 78), but they adorn themselves by face-painting also on other occasions. As an instance, men as well as women usually had their faces painted when visiting us in our camp. At the time we took this to be a manifestation of Indian vanity, but after having read Karsten's detailed account of the reasons for painting the face among the Indians, I am more inclined to the belief that this painting had been applied as a protection against such unknown spirit forces as might possibly threaten them in the camp of the whites.

831 That painting of the face is done at dances and meetings of a sexual
302 character, is a circumstance connected with the Indian belief that occasions

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¹ Karsten (1), p. 26, and (1), p. 17.

² Karsten (3), p. 205.

826 that the hair in certain magic rites could represent the person from whom it had been taken.¹ We find a similar belief existent among the Choroti who, because of it, carefully burn the hairs that they cut off or pluck out. They also believe that the souls of the dead, as well as evil spirits, are capable of working harm on the living by means of the hair, and on this belief is based the custom of the Choroti women of cutting off this

adornment on the death of their husbands.² Similarly, the practice universally prevalent among the Choroti of plucking out eyebrows, eyelashes and other hairs of the face, the hairs of the armpits and about the genital parts, is probably due to this belief.³ When a Choroti Indian takes a scalp, or fixes the scalp lock of a slain foe under his frontlet (see pp. 60, 61 and 103), it is probable that he considers that he has not only succeeded in obtaining a material trophy, but that the possession of the scalp or scalp lock to some certain extent confers upon him power over the spirit of his fallen adversary.⁴

In the foregoing (pp. 63 and 75) I have mentioned that the Choroti on certain occasions perform a kind of magic blood-letting by means of bone awls. I have also given an account of the Indian conception of the effects of this kind of blood-letting (see pp. 63 and 64). I will now add that I think it probable that the material of which the awl consists also plays a certain part.

Nordenskiöld has observed that the Ashluslay, when they are out looking for nests of wild bees, prick themselves above the eyes with a



Fig. 185. Bone awl for blood-letting. Probably made out of an ulna of a puma. The awl is wrapped round with a red, woollen fillet to prevent it from penetrating too deeply into the muscles. Choroti. Gran Chaco. Bolivia. ²/₃. Riksm. 03. 3. 82.



Fig. 186. Bone awl for blood-letting; also used for tattooing. Probably made from an ulna of a raptorial bird. The awl is wrapped round with grey and red woollen yarn (the latter nethermost) so as not to enter too deeply into the flesh. Choroti. Gran Chaco. Bolivia. ²/₃. Riksm. 03. 3. 83.

¹ Even as early as in the Warrend law, mention is made of hair being used in witchcraft.

² See page 182.

³ Karsten *ibid.* p. 10.

⁴ Cf. Karsten (4), p. 60.

755 better part of an hour, and when I was allowed to put on my clothes again, my body was full of large, red, marks from the sucking. The two worthies entertained me during the whole doctoring process with a lively conversation which I did not understand. From the pantomimic show I could, however, gather that it was a consultation. For a fee I gave one of the physicians a shirt and the other a pair of tight-fitting drawers.¹

[753] As mentioned before, in case of illness the Choroti try to back up the work of the medicine man by dancing; such dancing is then regarded as magically counteracting the influence of the spirit of the illness.² The spirit of the illness is by the Choroti called 'mohsek-ihitek', i. e., the arrow-shooting spirit, which, as I have pointed out in the foregoing, signifies that the Indians believe that the 'mohsek' in question has the power of causing illness by arrow-shot. The belief that illnesses could be caused by 'fairy-darts' is met with among a number of different peoples, and, as we know, was formerly common also in Sweden.

757 The Choroti also try to cure themselves of illnesses by internally taking medicines consisting of decoctions of herbs, etc. It is, nevertheless, possible that the Indians themselves regard these, which we consider natural, remedies as being magical.

731 When an epidemic disease causes many deaths in a Choroti village,
361 it is the practice of the Indians to burn the huts and remove to another site. This they do, either from fear of the spirits of the dead,³ or in order to dodge the attack of the spirit of the disease.⁴

764 On the death of her husband, a Choroti widow cuts off her hair and
765 burns it, and paints her face black with soot. We may take it that these signs of mourning also are of magical import. As an instance of this, the Choroti say that widows cut off their hair so that it shall not be a means of their husbands' spirits molesting them.⁵

769 One evening when after a long day's shooting I arrived at the Choroti village situated near our camp at Tatarenda, I was met by the sound of monotonous singing, muffled drumming, and the noise of magic rattles.

¹ Nordenskiöld (18), pp. 95 and 96.

² Karsten (1), p. 14.

³ Karsten (2), p. 30.

⁴ Cf. Karsten (1), pp. 32 and 33.

⁵ "When I asked the Chorotis why a widow cuts and destroys her hair, I received the answer that the dead husband, who wants his wife to follow him to the grave, is believed to attack her through the hair; in order to rid herself of this danger she shaves it off." Karsten (4), p. 62.

Of all this there was a cessation as soon as I had approached the village⁷⁶⁹ near enough for the dogs to give warning, by barking, that a stranger was coming. In answer to my question why there had been singing, drumming and shaking rattles, I was told that there had been a dance for somebody who had died in the village. From what the Indians represented to me I gathered that the dancing, the singing, and the 'music' had been performed in order to protect the soul of the dead person from being attacked by evil spirits, but it is possible that, instead of this, the dancers were aiming at protecting the villagers from being harmed by the spirit of the deceased, or from the evil spirit who had killed the newly dead person. The latter explanation is more in correspondence with other observations of the customs of the Choroti Indians.

In the literature one finds a statement that the Choroti bury their dead⁷⁶⁴ in a lying-down position.¹ This mode of burying does occur among the¹⁸⁴ Choroti, but these Indians also inter their departed ones in a hunched up, squatting position.² As an instance, the Choroti who were living near Tatarenda declared that they usually buried their dead in the last-mentioned position. This mode of burial may possibly be connected with cultural influence from the neighbouring Chiriguano, but in such a case that influence must have been active also among the Choroti living right away on the Pilcomayo, for all the Choroti skeletons (three) that Nordenskiöld excavated in the neighbourhood of Fort Crevaux had been buried in a sitting posture. Of the three Choroti skeletons unearthed by him at Caiza in the Tatarenda district, one was found 'in a doubled-up posture, with one hand on the top of the head and the other placed on the chest'.³

During our journey Nordenskiöld only excavated these six Choroti skeletons. He has kindly permitted me to publish his notes on the circumstances under which the skeletons were found. The data above referred to I have taken from the catalogue supplied by Nordenskiöld to the Ethnographical Section of the Riksmuseum, in which his original notes upon modes of burial are embodied (see preceding foot-note).

Even in my earliest published account of the Choroti Indians I made⁷⁶⁴

¹ Karsten (3), p. 204.

² von Rosen (2), p. 19.

³ This according to Nordenskiöld's original notes in the Riksmuseum inventory, 03. 3. Whether the skeletons excavated at Caiza were found in a sitting or lying down position is not expressly stated in the notes. But as regards the Choroti skeletons excavated at Crevaux, Nordenskiöld especially points out that they had been buried in a 'sitting posture'.

764 a point of relating how they sometimes put down bowls with water and food in the graves with their dead.¹ From the table which here follows it will also be seen that in Choroti graves may be found not only food and water bowls (clay pots and calabashes) but also that the departed one may even be supplied with a tobacco pipe. According to my opinion, the presence of food and drink in graves points to the Choroti believing in an existence following upon the death of the body, and that the soul is in need of food and drink.

According to Karsten, the Choroti occasionally also place earthenware pots filled with water on the graves. About this he writes as follows: 'The Choroti of the Chaco, who bury their dead in a lying position, customarily place at each end of the grave a clay pot half-filled with water. These water-filled clay pots are not meant as an offering to the spirit of the deceased, for that kind of offering is unknown to the Choroti. It is more probable that the pots are put on the grave on account of some other superstitious belief, and that to them is ascribed some supernatural power that is able to keep the demon of death at a distance.'²

It is possible that the purport of the *above described* custom is the one that Karsten considers it to be; on the other hand, to my thinking it is almost certain that the articles *placed in the grave* (it may be food and drink) are intended for the use of the dead.

If this is not the case, then it follows that e. g., the grave furniture shown in the synoptic table on page 185 must be regarded as amulets for warding off evil spirits from the dead. In the case of the snail shell (*Borus oblongus*), the theory that it was included in the grave equipment for that purpose is admittedly not improbable, but that the calabash bowl, the clay pot, leather bag and tobacco pipe were placed in the grave as amulets, is a thing I consider as being hardly probable. The circumstance of the Choroti interpreter telling me that the bowls of food and drink that the Choroti place in the grave with their dead are meant for provisioning the spirit on its journey, I do not, per se, accredit with any

¹ von Kusen (3), p. 52.

² Translated: Karsten (3), p. 304. — 'Die Choroti im Chaco, die Toten in irgendeiner Stellung begraben, haben die Gewohnheit, an jedes Ende des Grabes einen halb mit Wasser gefüllten Tontopf zu stellen. Diese mit Wasser gefüllten Tontöpfe sind nicht als Übergaben für den Toten gemeint, denn solche Übergaben sind den Choroti vollständig unbekannt. Es ist wahrscheinlicher, dass sie aus irgend welchen anderen abergläubischen Gründen auf das Grab gestellt werden und dass eine übernatürliche Kraft ihnen zugeschrieben wird, von der man annimmt, dass sie den Todestönen fernhält.'

Synopsis of circumstances relating to finds of Choroti skeletons.

Compiled by the Author from Erlend Nordenskiöld's notes, Riksm. Inventory, 03. 5.

Catalogue No. Riksm. 03. 5.	Locality of find	Sex of the buried	Posture of skeleton	Character of grave	Grave furniture	Remarks
10	Crevaux Gran Chaco Bolivia	Woman	Sitting	A round pit	None	The skeletons numbered 10, 11 and 12 are of members of the same family. They had been buried together
11	"	Man	"	"	"	See above
12	"	Boy or girl	"	"	"	"
13	Casta Gran Chaco Bolivia	Man	Crouching, one hand on the top of the head, the other on the chest. Not stated whether sitting or lying down	A rounded, oblong pit	A calabash	—
14	"	"	Doubled-up. Whether sitting or lying, is not stated	—	A clay pot, and a leather bag containing a tobacco pipe and some seeds which Nordenskiöld thought possibly tobacco seeds	—
15	"	Woman	"	A round pit	The shell of a land snail (<i>Born oblongus</i>), see fig. 43	—

- 764 decisive weight, for, as I have pointed out in the foregoing, one needs to use the utmost caution in accepting information which has been obtained through an interpreter. But as an eminently striking corroboration of the interpreter's statement there is, I may point out however, the fact that the Mataco Indians, who belong to the same ethnical group as the Choroti, often put down pots of food and drink in graves, and that the Mataco believe that the dead actually partake of the offering. The fact of this being so was easy enough of verification among the Mataco Indians who, already at the time of our journey, had to a certain extent acquired the Spanish tongue. At Rio Seco Nordenskiöld excavated a Mataco grave, and in this he found a clay pot. About this he writes as follows: "When I asked them what the pot was for, they told that it had contained water which the occupant of the grave had drunk on his journey; a reply showing that they have a firm belief in a life beyond the grave." Bearing in mind how closely the customs and usages of the Mataco upon the whole correspond with those of the Choroti, I am of opinion that, from consistent statements of the Choroti interpreter and Mataco Indians, we have very strong reasons for supposing the food- and drink vessels, the tobacco pipes, etc., that have been found in Choroti graves, were intended for the use of the dead.

¹ Nordenskiöld's notes, Riksmuseum inventory, 03. 5.

[pp. 187-268 not processed]

2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913) 1932 SI7 Mataco SI7

Toba 5/12

Choroti SK 6

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Indian Tribes of the Argentine and Bolivian Chaco.

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the death-spirit from rising from the grave. The Tobas believe that if shortly after the burial the body is exhumed, the spirit will come out and may transform himself into a tiger which will kill the people. But the latter may sometimes happen even without any particular profanation of the burial-place.

The customs here described with particular reference to the Tobas are typical of the burial customs of the Pilcomayo tribes in general. Thus the Choroti and the Mataco as a rule bury the corpse in a seated or reclining posture as do the Tobas. There are however exceptions to this rule, and at least in one case which came under my notice the dead Choroti man had been buried in a lying posture. At each end of the grave had been placed a clay pot, partly filled with water. The idea underlying this arrangement was not quite clear. Since among the Indians supernatural power is frequently ascribed to clay pots, it is probable that they had been placed on the tomb for some superstitious reasons, perhaps with a view to keeping off the death-demon. I may add that among the Chaco Indians offerings of food and drink, or other kinds of offering, are not generally made to the spirits of the departed. Certain traces of food and drink offerings have been found among the Mataco, but on the whole we may say that the cult of the dead, which plays such an important part in the religion of most South American Indians, is unknown to the natives of the Gran Chaco. When I asked the Choroti whether they would not offer food and drink to the spirit of an Indian who had recently been buried, they laughed and answered: «He is dead, he wants no food». Still of course neither the Choroti nor other Chaco Indians have wholly divested their minds of the primitive idea that in the after-life the soul has to a certain extent the same wants and appetites as in this earthly life.

As a rule the place where a person has been buried is not, among the Choroti and the Mataco, marked by any tomb or heap of earth thrown up over the grave. Some tribes, however, at any rate the Choroti, are in the habit of constructing, over the place, a primitive kind of hut, consisting of a roof of twigs and grass resting upon four poles. The hut is said to be the habitation of the *mohsek*. Chiefs and old family fathers are particularly honoured in this way after death.

The customs practised immediately after a death are in their main features the same in all Chaco tribes. The Choroti, as soon as the sick Indian has drawn his last breath, start to make a tremendous noise with all sorts of rattles and by shouting and wailing. The medicine-men

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[535] chant the whole night, beating drums and shaking rattles, while the women from time to time utter their peculiar dirge. Similarly among the Tobas drums and rattles are at work for several nights after the death takes place. Among the Mataco dancing forms part of the death-feast, the ceremonial dance *Katináh* being performed every night for a long time. The men taking part in this ceremony have their face blackened with charcoal as a »sign of sorrow«, but in reality as a protection against the death-demon. As a rule the Indians would not admit that they feared the departed soul. On the contrary, the Mataco told me that when the medicine-man beats his drum in the evening, he at the same time says to the departed soul in an insinuating voice: »May you stay here, may you not leave us!« The Choroti again, in speaking of the deceased use the stereotyped phrase: *uáhsah* (= *cis sáhe*), i. e. »he is good«, although at the same time their whole behaviour clearly shows that they stand in fear of him.

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273 The drinking of some intoxicating liquor also forms an important part of a death-feast, and it is considered necessary that the men taking part in the drinking-bout should get more or less intoxicated. The strong algaroba beer is most appreciated, but at those times of the year when there is no algaroba the Indians have to be content with beer brewed of tusca or chañar. Only in exceptional cases do the Chaco Indians drink maize beer at their feasts. The drinking of intoxicating liquors on these occasions has a ceremonial character and is believed to fill those taking part in it with power of resistance against the disease and death-demon.

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768 The way in which the Tobas purify the village after a death is typical of the Chaco Indians. Among all Pilcomayo tribes purification is chiefly carried out by means of fire brands which are waved about in all directions in the evening of the day on which the death takes place. Similarly, the destruction of the property of the deceased, the burning of his clothes and his other belongings, the destruction of the gourds from which he has eaten and drunk and, in general, of all things with which he has been in contact, are customary among the Choroti, the Mataco, and the Ash-luslay. The taboo of death is attached to them and they can no longer be used. The whole house of course particularly falls under the death taboo and is therefore always burned. But, the Mataco and the Choroti are generally not content with burning the hut where the deceased lived and where he died, but as a rule destroy the whole village, considering it polluted to such extent by the contagion of death that the